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# FORTUNES

# WASHED

# AWAY

A Series of  
Dramatizations  
of Better  
Land Use

No. 155 April 12, 1941 1:15 p.m.

"TRAGEDY NEAR MILLEDGEVILLE"

## W·L·W CINCINNATI

United States Department of Agriculture  
Soil Conservation Service  
Dayton · Ohio

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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SOUND: Whistling wind...

VOICE

Black blizzards across the plains.

SOUND OFF MIKE: Woman coughing...

SECOND VOICE

Biting wind!

DEEP VOICE

Choking dust.

SOUND: Up wind, set fire...

VOICE

Havoc...

SECOND VOICE

Destruction...

DEEP VOICE

Waste...

SOUND: Up wind, kill fire, set flood...

VOICE

Floods rushing down the great valleys.

VOICES IN UNISON

Floods, drowning, killing, wasting...

SOUND: Up wind...

DEEP VOICE

The wealth of America washing and blowing away -- soil erosion!

SOUND: Clap of thunder...

ANNOUNCER

Tragedy Near Milledgeville: the 155th consecutive episode of  
Fortunes Washed Away!

ORGAN THEME: DEEP RIVER

1914

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ANNOUNCER

Winter tourists, returning from Florida to the Lake States and the Cornbelt, cross the hills of north Georgia where they sweep down to meet the Piedmont. An easy day's driving from sunny Florida and the Gulf, these tourists may stop overnight in Atlanta, or perhaps in neighboring Gainesville or Athens. Up early as dawn breaks on Dixie, they see the undulating southern Piedmont beneath a frosty blanket. Smoke curls from chimneys across the fields, the sun's slanting rays glance down upon ten times ten billion sparkling diamonds. The South is a scene of quiet, peaceful, frosty brilliance. Then the sun warms the earthy vapors, the glistening diamonds slowly melt and disappear. Beneath them lie banks of red soil.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD.

SINISTER VOICE (filter mike)

The South has idle, eroded land. Far too often, this idle land leads to idle people, idle mules, idle equipment -- for land not used washes and erodes away, idle people lose time that is wasted forever, mules not at work eat their heads off for naught, idle machinery rusts and rots.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD.

ANNOUNCER

The soil once was fertile on the Piedmont plateau, and just beyond Milledgeville, where the red lands break away to the yellow and brown sands and clays of the Coastal plain, this too, is farming country -- cottonland. So long as white men can recall, this land has grown cotton -- cotton and corn, corn and cotton.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD.





SINISTER VOICE

Beyond Milledgeville to the west, along the time-worn Macon road, lies old plantation-land. Three thousand acres of it lie unattended, deserted, desolate -- three thousand acres of what was once some of the best land in all Georgia. They call it the "old prison farm." Three thousand acres.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD

NARRATOR

Let me tell you about that farm, and of Milledgeville. You see, my father owned part of that farm. His name was Captain Tom Newell, as fine a gentleman as ever lived. And that farm has known a story far romantic than its name describes. My father's farm maintained a home such as only the Old South knew...(FADE).

MOSE (fading in)

Yessuh! Ah sho wants to go halvers 'nother year, Cap'n Tom.

NEWELL

All right, Mose.

MOSE

Ah wouldn't know what to do with musself without ah growed cotton for you.

NEWELL

Then we'll go ahead just as we always have . You can give me three bales of cotton for your rent. That's my usual agreement -- three bales to every one-mule farm.

MOSE

Yessuh, whatever you say, Cap'n Tom. I'se satisfied just long's you'll keep me in meal and fat back.



NEWELL

Sure. Sure. But...oh, another thing, Mose. I want you to do one more thing as your part of the bargain. I want you to terrace some of the land.

MOSE

Ter...terra...what's dat you say you wants me to do, Cap'n Tom?

NEWELL

I want you to terrace the fields. Build some of those hillside ditches to stop the soil washing -- hold the run-off water.

MOSE (vaguely understanding)

Yessuh, ah'll terra...yessuh, ah'll do whatever you says, Cap'n.

NEWELL

And Mose...you'll have to swap the cornland and the cottonland this year. It's good for the soil to rotate the crops. So you don't corn the land to death, or cotton it too long.

MOSE

Yessuh, ah reckon you'se right. Hit's good to swap the land. But 'bout dat ter...terrasin, Cap'n, ah don't know if...now, if'n somebody'll show me how...

NEWELL

Sure, we'll show you how. You plow around the hill, with just a little down-grade all the time, plow several f urrows in the same plow, so you'll make a ditch to carry the water away without washing the field. Oh, you've seen your boy Flay do it.

MOSE (beginning to understand)

Oh, yessuh, ah knows now what you all means -- ditches like what Flay done build over there. Yessuh, ah kin do dat all right, me and my mule. Say, Cap'n Tom, you'se fixin' fer me to have a mule, ain't yuh?

THEY

June, June, but... another thing, these...  
the more thing as your part of the...  
name of the land.

THEY

far... because... what's that you say you...  
I want you to terrace the fields. Build a wall to the...  
disposal to stop the soil washing... hold the...  
1000 (very understanding)

THEY

Yes, yes... yes, yes... yes, yes...  
And now... you'll have to work the...  
this year. It's good for the soil to...  
don't cover the land to death, or...  
1000

THEY

Yes, yes... yes, yes... yes, yes...  
But don't get... yes, yes... yes, yes...  
1000

THEY

Yes, yes... yes, yes... yes, yes...  
1000

THEY

Yes, yes... yes, yes... yes, yes...  
1000

THEY

Yes, yes... yes, yes... yes, yes...  
1000



NEWELL

Don't worry about a mule, Mose. I always furnish the hard-tails. I'll give you seed and tools, and we'll split the crop. Well, I've got to be getting along. Giddap, Whiskers.

SOUND: Horse trots off...

NEWELL (calling back off mike)

Remember, Mose...don't forget the terraces!

MOSE

Nawsuh, Boss, ah won't fergit. (MUMBLING TO SELF) Terra... terrasin. Dawgone me! Ah done tol' de Cap'n ah'd do sumpin ah don't know nothin' 'bout. He sure nuf git's ideas 'bout farmin'.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD

SINISTER VOICE

Three thousand acres of some of the best soil of all Georgia. We took it for granted that land was everlasting. Tools would wear out, men would die. But the land would remain.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD

NARRATOR

My father tried to take care of the land. You should have known him. Tall, deep voiced -- every inch a gentleman. During his military campaigns, he had occasions to meet General Alfred H. Colquitt. By accident, more than design, he met the General's daughter -- Ann Lane Colquitt, my mother. Folks in Milledgeville still remember Captain Newell. Too, they remember Ann Colquitt Newell for her untiring charitable work. Our white-pillared Newell mansion still stands in that city, as if peering backward through the years, remembering the hard years of the reconstruction, hard times of the eighties, the romance and parties of the gay nineties. That fine old home has seen the decline of the land. One evening...



SOUND: Gay party noises...

ORGAN: GEORGIA ON MY MIND.

SOUND: Door opens and both music and noise fade as it closes...

SOUND: Woman's footsteps on wooden-floored porch...

BETTY (fading in)

Daddy, you should be in with the guests. Why all alone here in the moonlight?

NEWELL

Oh, hello Betty. I'm just listening to the music...and watching the moon. And might I ask why you're not dancing?

BETTY

I wondered where you were. Daddy, you look worried. Is something wrong?

NEWELL

Wrong? Oh no. Everything's all right...except that cotton is worth only four cents a pound. It's rather difficult, my dear, to keep the croppers in meal and meat, and mules and tools, on four-cent cotton.

BETTY

You mustn't worry. Things will come out all right. They always do, don't they?

NEWELL

I guess so, my dear. They always have...here, turn your head.

BETTY

Why do you look at me like that?

NEWELL

I was just thinking how much you remind me of your mother. My, how you've grown. Our baby...and look at you...grown up.

... (11) : Gay party noise...

... (12) : ...

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... (38) : ...



BETTY

Mother was pretty when she was a girl, wasn't she?

NEWELL (reminiscently)

Indeed she was, my dear. Do you know what she told me once?

BETTY

What?

NEWELL

She said she admired me for being chivalrous. You women folk know how to flatter a man. And then she promised to marry me. It was at commencement time, down at Oxford.

BETTY

Oh, mother has told me about that.

NEWELL (with mock indignation)

She has? Why...wait until I see her!

BETTY

I'll bet you were handsome then. But you're still handsome to me. You must have been a good lawyer. Why did you quit being a lawyer, Dad?

NEWELL

Oh, the plantations required too much attention. I had to spend most of my time looking after the croppers. And you know I was mayor of Milledgeville after the war.

BETTY

A good one, too!

JOHN

John was pretty sure she was a girl, wasn't she?

(remissively)

Indeed she was, my dear. Do you know what she said?

JOHN

JOHN

JOHN

She said she admired me for being a woman.

How do I like a man. And then she said:

at convenient time, down at Oxford.

JOHN

Oh, mother has told me about that.

(with weak indignation)

And how? Why... well, well I see!

JOHN

I'll bet you were indignant then. But what's the use of that?

You must have been a good I suppose. Oh, but what's the use of that?

JOHN

JOHN

Oh, the pleasure of being a woman, isn't it?

And of my kind looking at things in a different way.

And of my kind looking at things in a different way.

JOHN

A good one, isn't it?

NEWELL

It was the capital of Georgia then. Well, those things required so much of my time that I...I just couldn't do so much. Besides, I like the land. I've always liked the freedom you have out of doors. I like to see the land plowed and planted and tilled. The only thing is, our land isn't as good as it used to be.

BETTY

Why, what do you mean?

NEWELL (slowly measured speech)

I think we have used it too hard. The soil is like a mule. You have to feed it and take care of it, or it will wear out. The only difference is that you can always buy a new mule when the old one wears out. But when the land wears out, it's gone, forever.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD.

SINISTER VOICE

The old Newell plantation became a part of the Prison Farm -- three thousand acres of some of the best land of all Georgia. Yes, we took it for granted that land was everlasting. Tools would wear out, men would die. But the land would remain.

ORGAN: HORROR CHORD.

NARRATOR

My father, Tom Newell, was a good farmer, judged by the standards of his time.

ORGAN: Sneak in GEORGIA ON MY MIND.





NARRATOR

Perhaps he saw the handwriting on the wall. Perhaps he saw what one-crop farming was doing to his land. Certainly he urged his tenants to conserve their soil -- as best they knew how then. That "best" was not enough. The old plantation is gone -- gone because we didn't know enough about the soil. But I still remember what my father said...when the land wears out, it's gone, forever.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

ANNOUNCER

That is the end of one era in the history of a Georgia plantation, the story of a splendid Georgia family. And now, for another chapter in the story, we turn to the Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and here is our old friend, Gene Charles.

CHARLES

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_. Well, I'll get down to brass tacks. The Newell farm was once covered with pines and hardwoods. The land was fertile, but the topsoil was thin. It would wash away if unprotected, and unfortunately, that's what happened.

ANNOUNCER

Even though Tom Newell was a conservationist at heart.

CHAPTER

perhaps in the new the handwriting on the wall. The one-  
group learning was being to his hand. Doubtless the  
seems to connect this with -- as I have said -- that  
"best" was not enough. The old plantation was --  
we didn't know enough about the soil. But I really  
my father said. When the time came, it's

END OF THE

CHAPTER

and as the end of one era in the history of the  
the story of a splendid Georgia. And now, the  
chapter in the story, we turn to the old plantation  
the United States. I have said, in the  
Ireland, and America.

CHAPTER

Thank you, Mr. ...  
The World's ...  
and the ...  
important, and ...

CHAPTER

... ..

CHARLES

Oh, no....I wouldn't say that. It was sold to the state in 1890, and apparently it wasn't washed and gullied at that time. Probably continuous cropping had caused considerable sheet erosion, but it hadn't advanced to the stage of gullying. When the state began sending prisoners to Milledgeville, the farm was cropped harder than ever. "Grow as much cotton and corn as possible" was the command. Year by year, more of the soil washed away. Year by year those rains dug the gullies a little deeper. Finally, the farm had to be abandoned as worthless.

ANNOUNCER

Abandoned as worthless. Those are unpleasant words, Gene.

CHARLES

Unpleasant indeed, wherever you hear them -- north, south, east, or west.

ANNOUNCER

So now, only 50 years since it grew a bale of cotton to the acre, this farm stands out as proof that the land is not everlasting, but like mules and tools, will wear out. But is the State of Georgia doing anything to reclaim or rebuild the abandoned farm?

CHARLES

Yes, in 1938 the State Penal Board met to decide what to do with the land. Here was a tax free farm, worked with convict labor, that had proved so unprofitable it had been abandoned. Mr. T. L. Asbury, State Coordinator of the Soil Conservation Service, met with the board and worked out an erosion control plan that called for planting trees on almost all the land.

ANNOUNCER

Land once in trees -- going back to trees. Who set them out?

CHAPTER

It would not be surprising if it were said that the  
and apparently it would be said that the  
concerning the people and the people's  
had advanced to the stage of the  
sending missions to the people, the  
then over. "Grow as much cotton and corn as you can"  
command. Year by year, more of the soil was being  
these things and the people's  
had to be abandoned as worthless.

CHAPTER

Abandoned as worthless. These are the people's

CHAPTER

Unpleasant indeed, whatever the cause of the

TO THE

CHAPTER

So now, only 50 years since the first

this time stands out as a great

but little more and little, with some

people doing nothing to make it

CHAPTER

Yes, in 1930 the state of

this land. Now we are

this and moved to another

Abdullah, the Governor of the

with the board and worked

The planning began on almost

CHAPTER

It is one of the things



CHARLES

CCC enrollees, \_\_\_\_\_, from the CCC camp at Stevens Pottery.

ANNOUNCER

Was the entire farm reforested?

CHARLES

Not quite. Two thousand acres have been reforested, but there's still probably 500 acres to be planted. Two million trees -- that if set in a straight line six feet apart, would extend for a distance of 23 hundred miles.

ANNOUNCER

A long, long row of trees -- and they provide a rather pretty and encouraging ending to a long, tragic, yet romantic story of an old southern farm.

CHARLES

Decidedly encouraging, I would say, \_\_\_\_\_, because the trees have survived and are growing satisfactorily. Most of Georgia is natural tree country and the beauty of it is that the rural people there are rapidly becoming soil conservation conscious. They are undoing some of the damage that has been done. Some day, if properly cared for, and I believe it will be, this old prison farm will be a beauty spot of which Baldwin County, Georgia will be proud. In the Georgia College for Women I found a little poem written by one of Milledgeville's own citizens -- Nelle Womack Hines. It's about "Home" and gives an appropriate concluding touch, I think, to this story:

ORGAN: SNEAK IN DEEP RIVER.



CHARLES (continued)

"My very heart's desire is safe  
within thy walls;  
The voices of my loved ones --  
Friends who come --  
My treasured books that rest  
in niche serene --  
All make more dear  
thy haven sweet.  
Nor do my feet  
Desire to wander out except that they  
May have the glad return  
at eventide.

ORGAN: UP AND OUT.

#

(continued) 22.11.70

"by way of this letter to you"  
which I hope will  
also be of some use to you  
in the future. I am sure  
that you will find it  
all very interesting.  
I hope to hear from you  
again soon. I am sure  
that you will find it  
all very interesting.  
I hope to hear from you  
again soon. I am sure  
that you will find it  
all very interesting.

Yours faithfully,  
J. H. H. H.